



WOOD

A HANDFUL OF LILACS

PS 8545
044H3



A Handful of Lilacs
AND
OTHER POEMS



—GERTRUDE WOOD



Pre-June '50

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A HANDFUL OF LILACS

June 7, 1938

I was low in my mind this morning,
Tired, discouraged and ill,
The endless, thankless housework
Seemed all my life to fill;

Came a timid rap at the shed-door,
Forgotten were mops and brooms,
For there stood a brown-eyed cherub,
With a handful of lilac blooms.

I buried my face in the blossoms,
My eyes were filled with tears,
—How had those lovely lilacs
Weathered our ten dry years?

I closed my eyes to the prairie,
And let my memory run
Where blue St. Lawrence ripples
Dance on in the morning sun,

Where clear, little waves play over
A long, low, pebbly shore,
By an old house set in an orchard,
With lilacs around the door.

Oh! The Lord might have left out lilacs
When forming a world of trees,
There are so many other blossoms
For the humming, honey-bees.

Be He thought of the hurried house-wife,
Whose spring's work's never o'er,
And He fashioned the perfumed lilacs
To bloom beside her door.

Did you think as you broke those branches,
Of Mary of Bethany,—
'Inasmuch' as you shared your perfume
With 'one of His least', like me?

Thanks ever so much, dear neighbor!
To faith new life is given,
For He who could make the lilacs
Can surely make a Heaven.

SASKATCHEWAN

(On a piece of petrified tropical tree found in our field)

When southward glaciers of old had inched their way,
And left but sepulchres of what had been,
Sweet Mother Nature, weeping for lost loveliness,
Spread over all her mantle of soft green.
Her tears wore courses for themselves across the plain,
And park and prairie breathed perfume again.

Thus lay the land for centuries of quietness,
Till came the bison on his thundering way,
The beaver, and the deer, the prowlers of the night,
And birds with music all the sunny day.
Then, wandering Redmen came from out the far unknown,
And claimed the whole vast valley for their own.

Their reign was brief. The white man ever with the sun
Adventuring westward, found the verdant plains;
With guns, with fiery dragons on steel rails, he came;
With all man's new inventions he remains,
For he has made the west,—whose Indian name lives on,—
The granary of the world,—Saskatchewan.



GLEN BAIN

(The C.P.R. extension from Vanguard to Meyronne was built as a relief measure in 1930. "Glen Bain" was the name given to the siding about the centre of the R.M. of Glen Bain, which had not previously had a hamlet within its boundaries.)

1944

A mushroom growth on prairie sod,
Unheeding mere surveyor's rod,
'Twas sired by dark Adversity,
And born of stark Necessity;
But, with a native, lusty strength
It sprawls its adolescent length
Beside the curving railroad track,
Nor ever thinks of looking back.
Though strained and torn by wind and drouth,
And drained by war of its best youth,
Yet, drawing life-blood from the soil,
From sun and rain and honest toil,
'Twill live and thrive while there remain
Green fields of grain around Glen Bain.

WHAT IS A POEM?

A poem is a threading of fine gems
Of language on a lofty line of thought;
A rainbow of the dewy pearls of truth
In delicate cobwebs of fancy caught.

'Tis music from the harp-strings of the heart,
With elfin echoes and a bell from Heaven,
In measured lines and singing tones that mark
The sense of rhythm to creation given.

It is a crystal vase to bear aloft
The buds of beauty and the bloom of truth,
An incense burning on some hidden fire,
—God-given, though the censor seem uncouth,

For words are weak, and poets oft hard-pressed
To best express the passion that they feel,
The vanity of mere material things,
The Love, and Truth, and Beauty that are real.

Ev'n may a life, revealing loveliness,
And filt'ring beauty from the flying years,
Become a living poem, fit to be
Set to the golden Music of the Spheres.

And, with the essences of lovely things
That will live on when Earth no longer turns,
Diffusing fragrance through Eternity,
Find that for which the restless spirit yearns.

THE TAPESTRY

(Silver Wedding Sonnet)

A Weaver wrought for years at one design,
Selecting every thread with utmost care,—
Though some were rough, yet some were wondrous fine,
Of rainbow mist and the Aurora's hair,—
Blending dark Grief, and Passion shot with Pain,
With lovely pastel shades of Tender Care,
Bright Faith and Trust, and Hope's clear, silver strain,
And pure gold threads of Understanding, rare.

I watched the Weaver ply his art,
And wondered what his skill might bring to be,—
(Time was the Weaver, and his loom my heart),—
And, when at last he turned and, smilingly,
Gave there into my keeping what he wove,
Lo, all the Tapestry was one word, "LOVE".

HAIL AND GODSPEED

I might have stayed safe in a sheltered arm
of the seething sea of life,
Knowing naught of the sounding sea's alarm,
The storm, the stress, the strife,
But no! I must brave the buffetting wind,
The treacherous undertow,
Try deeps and shallows, and fare to find
What lies where the sunsets glow.

Now, caught in the toils of the net of Fate,
I float by the shore and sigh
That I, in this eddy, must watch and wait
While the rest of the world goes by.
I cannot sail free, but I scorn to be
Dumb drift of the wind and tide;
I'll rig me a sail that will carry a "Hail
And Godspeed" to the folk outside.

SHATTERED

She shattered a dish with her careless hand,
And wept where the fragments lay;
Then gathered them up, and, so patiently
Put them together one day.
The dish is now useful as ever it was,—
Its beauty is gone for aye.

She shattered her life in her careless way,
Then, filled with a deep dismay,
She patched up the pieces oh! painfully,
And tried to be brave and gay.
Her life may be useful, but never again
As lovely as yesterday.

METAMORPHOSIS

(On being accepted as a member of the Saskatchewan Poetry
Society, March, 1944.)

And are these "Bubbles"
from the labouring heart of me
To be called "Poetry"?
Has come a dawn

When quiet twitterings
of a barn-swallow can be
Heard by the sky-larks
of Saskatchewan?

MY 1937 PRAYER

Lord, help me to forget
The bare, brown fields,
Storm-tortured, dry, wind-swept,
Bereft of yields.

Let me not watch the stock,
Dejected, pass.
The sloughs are dry as rock,
There is no grass.

Let me not think all day
Of garden-plot,
Where dusty ridges play
But plants are not.

Let me but see the trees,—
Their leaves are green,
And birds still nest in these,
And sing, serene.

Help me to raise my eyes,
For this is June,
See white-puffed, June-blue clouds,
And hum a tune.
Though as I gaze, dust-clouds,
A yellow pall,
Sweep up, and with dim shrouds
Envelop all.

Yet, Lord, my heart must rise
These clouds above,
And find through Faith's clear eyes
That God IS Love.

THE STARS ABOVE DIEPPE

The Christmas stars are shining bright;
Not far and pale and cold,
But clear and warm, and near to-night,
With sheen of new, pure gold;—
Unearthly radiance shed by souls
Who share Love's sacrifice,
Giving their all for this lost world,
And proud to pay the price.

A Star once shone on Juda's plain,
When Love left Heaven for earth,
To teach life is not length of days,
But depth of Truth and Worth,
So the clear shining Christmas stars
This message flash to me,—
True life, however brief on earth,
Shines all Eternity.

HARD TIMES 1930-37

Darn! Patch! Mend! Patch! Mend! Darn!
This is my song that has no end,
So long as I've thread and yarn.
Look at the patch on this stocking-knee
As far as machine may go,—
It takes all the yarn in the house, you see,
For the holes in the heel and toe.

Darn! Mend! Patch! Rip! Stitch! Sew!
Garments so old there's no piece to match,
And holes that just seem to grow!
Where shall I start on this underwear?
And what can I do with that shirt?
They're only fit for the duster-bag,
But must be got ready for work.

Whirr! Seam! Snip! Seam, Snip! Whirr!
This is so old it is hard to rip,
But must be made over for "her".
How I sigh for new goods for an overall,
And a stocking that couldn't get rents
No matter where kiddies may run or fall,
Or crawl through a barb-wire fence!

Whirr! Snip! Stitch! Darn! Patch! Mend!
I should be thankful that I am so rich
That at least I have things to mend!
Thankful that health and our happiness
And Home can never depend
On markets, nor weather, nor what we miss,
Nor on how much I have to mend.

1938's FIRST RAIN

The earth whirls up in a sky-ward roll;
As the dust-storm strikes for its usual toll,
The wee birds chirrup, "In God we trust,
Stick your claws in the nest; here comes the dust!"
Says a frog, "Ten years since our last spring croak,
But dig down again or you're going to choke!"

Though tired and broken, last year's Russian thrushes
Come flying along when the dust-storm whistles;
All swathed are the windows in papers and sheets,
We know now the rounds when the dust repeats;
But, hark! is that sand 'against the window-pane?
No, it isn't, by heck! it's real, old RAIN!

THE TONGUE

An Eastern monarch once to his great sorrow learned
That many nobles of his court with anger burned
Toward each other, and that all the land was rife
With jealousies, and slanders, evil words, and strife.
So, deep he thought, and made a plan, and sent word
forth.

To all his sages, nobles, leaders, men of worth,
That they should dine with him upon a certain day,
When he would set forth to them all, in great array,
The best, most wondrous thing earth could afford;
"Likewise," said he, "the worst of all shall grace my
board."

Great wonder was there then what this strange feast
would show,

And not a man invited but made haste to go.

Then, when before them all the feast was duly spread,
By two great covered bowls the King arose, and said,
"With one great purpose I have called ye here. So first.
That ye may partly understand, we serve the worst."

Then lifted he one cover, and from old and young
Burst forth, amazed and wondering, the cry, "'Tis
tongue!"

Then silence fell, a breathless silence, deep and long,
Till spake the noblest lord, "O King, thou art not wrong!
Much evil hath been wrought by this one agency,—
Lives ruined, friends estranged, by lies and flattery,
Or by half-truths repeated,—these the worst of lies!
Tongues, cruel and unkind, have changed earth's
destinies;

Even truth, when it can hurt, were better left unsaid;
Peace only comes when a kind heart doth rule the head."

The King next from the second bowl the cover flung.
"Behold," cried he, "the best!" A whisper low, "'Tis
tongue!"

Then from his place a hoary sage was seen to rise.

"Indeed, O King, thy lesson timely is, and wise.

What better blessing have we than this gift of tongue?

Without it, birds were silent, poets' songs unsung.

Should parents' tongues be stopped, and priest and
prophet dumb,

How think ye, then, could worth and wisdom come,
Courage and comfort that have saved men's lives, and
cheer

And friendship? Without these, which of us would be
here?

So then they there agreed their words should tested be
By these three tests,—Truth, Kindness and Necessity.

Peace and prosperity unto that land then came,

And happiness,—a higher, greater fame.

These tests for spoken words we well may bear in mind.

"Is it the truth?" "Quite necessary?" "Is it kind?"

THE UNSUNG HERO OF THE '30's

No minute guns nor roll of drums,
No tablet to his fame,
No news headlines have yet enshrined
The glory of his name;
Yet none who boast of fame or power,
Or blue blood in his veins
Has truer heart or firmer worth
Than the hero of our plains.

No gold braid on his uniform,—
Blue overalls and smock!—
No railway pass has he, nor car,
He'll stay at home, or walk.
Though fate has shattered all his dreams,
Surrender he disdains.
With head erect he carries on,—
Brave hero of the plains!

Grim disappointment and defeat
Are his from day to day,
For worms and hoppers yearly eat
What isn't blown away;
Yet faithfully he tries again
New plans and greater pains,—
Was ever gamier battle fought,
O, hero of our plains?

Lest man and beast should starve and freeze
He bows to take "relief,"—
It galls his soul, but all his toil
Has brought forth only grief.
The game's not worth the candle? Ah!
His man's pride yet remains,
Till drouth and blight give up the fight,
True hero of the plains!

He'll whistle 'round the barn at work,
And sing upon the plough,
Though time and toil are taking toll,
And furrowing his brow.
He lends a hand to neighbors, and
He'll be here when it rains!
All honour to his courage then,
Brave hero of our plains!

OUR CANADA

In her robe of glistening white she swings
From the shores of three great seas,
In the rainbow light the Aurora flings
She rides, she skates, she skis;
Across the prairie she whistles, and sings
Through the tops of her age-old trees.

Then she doffs her robe; and her arms are full
Of the fruits of forest and field,
And lake and mine, milk, honey and wool,
The best a good Earth may yield;
While the reins in her hands can feel the pull
Of the power her industries wield.

She is gay and lovely, yet brave and true,
With her proud, young head held high;
Her feet would the paths of peace pursue,
So she lifts her face to the sky.
O, Canada! Time be kind to you,
As his changing years roll by!

TODAY

Each morning from His shining store
Of jewels rare,
My Father kindly lends me one
That I may make it gleam the more
While in my care,—
Then gathers it again at set of sun.

I can't escape this daily gift,
Nor will it wait;
Each gem appears, then slips away.
I may, unheeding, let it drift
Until too late
And I may blur and mar its shining ray.
But I may make it radiant,—
Rough edges smooth,
Each duty-facet sparkle clear,
With polish made of glad content,
The file of truth,

Patience and courage, and a heart sincere.
Then, when my Father takes me home,
And lets me view
The jewels He had lent to me,
What joy if I shall see there some
That gleam anew
With what I gave them for Eternity!

JAZZ

I'm glad we have a radio to bring us daily news,
Music, drama, travelogues, famed folk voicing views,
I close my eyes and dream I'm far from all my woes
awhile,

But I come home with sudden start when someone swings
the dial,—

"Pip, Squeak, Zip, Bang, Hootle, Tootle, Boom,
Bing, Crash, Tinkle, Spang, Clikkety-lick, and Zoom!"

How will they know just when to stop,

It's neither music nor tune?

Right in the middle a pale voice wails

Over his heart and the moon.

"Crash, Crackle, Ping, Click, Diddle-de-tink, and Plop,
Tinkly and Tootle, Twang and Zoom, Licketty-bang!
Stop!"

I like the old-time fiddlers. Of course, I like to dance,
And "hot" or "sweet" swing music is full of gay romance,
But I'm thankful for the limit of time each Programme
has

When someone swings the dial to where they're playing
"Jazz."

I used to tell the children when they were small girls and
boys,—

With whistles, horns, and pans for drums, "Stop that
uneearthly noise."

If I had only shouted, "Whoops," or, "Swing it, kids, and
how!"

I might have learned that that was "Jazz," and might
have liked it now!

WE WILL REMEMBER

(Can be sung to: "I'll Walk Beside You")

We will remember those who marched away,
For Home and Country on that bitter day;
To free a world,—to keep us free, they pay!
We will remember those who marched away.

We will remember what they sacrificed,—
Their homes and loved ones,—all that here they prized.
The "greater part" in life they surely play;
We will remember those who marched away.

We will remember those who come no more,—
Who gave their lives,—as One had done before.
The glory of the Risen Lord they share;
We will remember till we meet them there.

FICKLE PRAIRIE

O, lovely prairie,—fickle, falsely fair,
With Spring's shy smile, and roses in her hair!
In misty green, with blue of flax arrayed,
She lured me till I knelt to her and prayed
That I might dwell forever with her there.

She wooed me with a soft and scented breeze,
With bird-songs in the grass and willow-trees,
With sunny days, blue skies and mellow moon,
With promises of harvestings full soon,—
She had a wile my every mood to please.

Enchanted thus, I lingered, knowing not
Sly Time was binding me, forging a knot
That kept me captive when the spell was gone,
When time for harvest came, and there was none,
But weary wilderness and barren blot.

I gave the Prairie all I had to give,
And only asked the wherewithal to live.
She flung me hail and rust, and insect pests,
With hot, dry, mocking laughter at her jests,
Till drouth destroyed what never can relive.

Ah! Fickle Prairie! False, but oh! so fair,
With flowers in her waving hair!
When breezes toss through golden grain again,
And sun and shadow play across the plain,
Will I forget the wounds she made me wear?

FOREVER THE WIND

Winds blow through the prairie grass,
Over the mouldering stones,
Soft whispering, as they pass,
Mournful, murmuring tones.

Men, gathering off the stones,
Plough up the prairie grass,
But hear not the warning tones,
Of the winds as they pass.

Telling of tolling time their tones,
As the centuries pass,
Of plows rusting by old, grey stones,
And graves grown over with grass.

Winds blow through the prairie grass,
Over the mouldering stones,
Lifting to drifting clouds that pass
The wail of their mournful tones.

EARS HAVE THEY

The "common people heard Him gladly." They
Beheld the world's Messiah in that day.

Just "common people"? Why not Pharisees?
The Scribes, the Sadducees, and such as these?

Why not the Rulers of the Synagogues,
The Governor, the Priests and Pedagogues?

Why did not Roman Rulers heed these things
And pay their homage to the King of Kings?

Their habits and conventions held them fast,
Blind to the Lord of Glory walking past.

Ambition, Pride and Prejudice combined
To keep them deaf, indifferent and blind;

Yet, "common people,"—fishermen and such,—
Became saints and Apostles at His touch.

THEN AND NOW

"O, Lord, the enemy is near,
We are afraid!
We do our best, but for the rest
We need Thine aid.

"This is a Christian land;
The foe deny
Thy Name and Power, so, in this hour
To Thee we cry."

We filled the churches then
On bended knee;
And as we prayed, God lent His aid
For Victory.

Churches are empty now,—
"WE won the war!"
From danger free, it seems that we
Need God no more!

Are we not Christians when
The cannons cease?
—We yet may have to pray, "Lord, save
— Us from the peace!"

DREAMTIME

Hush, my Sweet, 'tis dreamtime!

Stars are swinging low,
Lighting little dream-lamps
In a shining row.

Hush, my Dear, 'tis dreamtime!

Far beside the rills,
Lie the little lambkins,
Sleeping on the hills.

Hush, my Own, 'tis dreamtime!

In the leafy trees
Baby birds are swinging
In the evening breeze.

Hush, my Babe, 'tis dreamtime!

All the lovely flowers
Fold their pretty petals,
Through the long, dark hours.

Hush, my Sweet, 'tis dreamtime!

Close those sleepy eyes,
Drift away to Dreamland
Where the moon-light lies.

Hush, my Babe, 'tis dreamtime!

Angel wings are near,
Through the night enfolding
Slumbering babies here.

GROW A LILY

Do you have doubts of the power of God?

Grow a lily.

Note each new leaf growing green and broad,
The firm, strong stalk where the big buds nod;
Watch then the beautiful bloom unfold,
Its colors and texture, and how it was rolled,
Its stamens and pistil,—each part so complete,—
Beauty and Life from the mud at your feet!—
So grows a soul from humanity's clod,
Miracles both from the Hand of our God!

Grow a lily!

TO A GRADUATING NURSE

Our bit of Immortality
Is housed in animated clay
So brief a time, all honour be
To those who, tireless, day by day
Care for these "temples of the soul,"
And do their best to make them whole!

FOR 'YOUR BIRTHDAY

It may be "life is earnest,"—
May even be sublime,
Yet we're like children playing
Upon the sands of time.
So many lovely castles,
Or gardens fair to see,
The tides wash out at evening,—
Tides of Eternity.

But, too, we gather pebbles,
—And some of these will stay
To help some other builder,
Some other summer day;
For, every year of living,
From out our gathered store,
We drop in Memory's bucket
Some pebbles from life's shore.

Some are such shining pebbles,
And others clear as rain;
Some bear bright rings of beauty,
And some are dark with pain;
Some lovely marbled pebbles
Show joy and sorrow's fret,
While others are grey backgrounds
For jewels in them set.

And each one bears a message
As each has borne a part
In brightening as a flower
The seashore of some heart.
And so, this Birthday Morning,
I hope you find one spot
On a grey pebble where I painted
A bright For-get-me-not.

LOVE IN WARTIME

A blossom gay
Was born at dawn,
Bloomed but a day,
And then was gone;
Alas, for beauty blasted!

Why should it bloom,
Full life denied?
A faint perfume
Beside me sighed,
'Twas lovely while it lasted!"

WHISPERING WINDS

Wild winds roar through the tree-tops tall,
And whip the flying leaves;
They shriek aloft among the wires,
Or moan about the eaves;
But, when I'm all alone at home,
And the prairie night is still,
Then little winds come whispering
Around my window-sill.

When winter blows across the snows,
They whisper, "Spring comes soon,"
In summer-time they chant a rhyme
About the harvest moon.
They're always waiting for me there,
And never night so still
I do not hear them whispering
Around my window-sill.

I'm often at the window here,
For clouds, and trees, and birds,
The grasses and the growing things
Sing peace, and need no words.
Then winds that blow by day and night
Far over land and sea,
At evening whisper soft and low,
And tell their tales to me.

They've ruffled up a Major's hair,—
He sighs for home again;
They kissed a Pilot, young and fair,
As he stepped from his plane;
They caught a teacher's sunny smile
Where prairie winds blow free;
Such homely bits of news the winds
Come whispering to me.

They tell old tales of prairie days,
And wandering Indian braves;
They sing me songs of long ago,
Old Friends, and newer graves;
They bring me cheer, and help me hope,
They bid my heart be still,—
Those welcome little whispering winds,
Around my window-sill.

FIVE IMPS

Five ugly imps to their master came
One day with loud lament,—
Hate, Anger, Jealousy, Lust and Greed
To "good folk" had been sent;—

"Had we the appeal that Bigotry has,
Smug Pride and high Arrogance,
Or even the luck Indifference has,
We might, with the good have a chance.

"But we are too ugly for such," they cried,
"They see us, and quick recoil,
But give us a camouflage, or a spell,
And see how their souls we'll soil!"

Old Nick was stirring a potent brew,
Had stood for a year and a day;
He sipped a sup or two, and, said he,
"Here's something we can make pay."

In fancy bottles he fixed the stuff,
And corked the five imps inside;
Set them in the path of Shining Ones
Who pleasures for Earth provide.

Thus Happiness, Friendship, Cheer and Joy
Found these as they sped to earth,
And passed them on to innocent folk
In need of relief or mirth.

And so the foul imps got in their work
With the "good," as they meant to do;
And Greed grows fat for there's money made
Off the victims of devil's brew.

MY JEWELS

In the velvet pink of a rose at dawn,
Lingers a pearly gem;
And, sprinkled on fairy veils on the lawn,
Are bits of a diadem.
On the frosty pane, and glittering snow,
Diamonds wink at the sun,
And twinkle again as the evening stars
Pick them up one by one.
The blazing jewels of sunset's glow
Gleam on in the twilight skies;
Opals drip from the moon to the lake,
And sapphires are in your eyes.

THE NORMALITE'S "GEM"

1936

"They're too old-fashioned," she said of gems
Of poems I'd learned to love;
And a puzzled pucker her forehead wore,
Her point she would like to prove.
She showed me the "gem" she meant to use,—
True, it had metre and rhyme,
But lacked most qualifications taught
Of poetic gems in my time.

'Twas a cheerful, practical bit of advice
To take life's bumps with a smile;
The teacher, too, had approved of it,
So it made me wonder a while.
Must youth of to-day be told to smile?
Is life so full of dread
That poetry's only a plea for pluck?
Are "hyacinths going for bread"?

'Tis certain, indeed, that humanity's greed
Has marred the Creator's plan,
Has cornered comforts, smothered hopes,
And maimed the ambitions of man,
But it can't touch the glory of sunset's glow,
The flash of a bluebird's wings,—
And Browning tells us that "even in mud
And scum there's something sings."

With an eye for beauty, an ear for song,
And a foot for the second mile,
With a heart a-tuned to the Infinite,
Why need you be told to smile?
Love is "old-fashioned," and Beauty, and Truth,
"There's nothing new under the sun,"
And you're losing a lot if contented with less
Than the best that has yet been done.

THE DRINKER

He drinks in winter, to warm him some,
But chills more quickly. How very dumb!
He drinks in summer to make him cool,
But then it fevers his brain, poor fool!
He drinks in comp'ny so he'll seem bright,
But just acts silly,—a sorry sight!
Now, could we snap him when he's so tight,
Would he recognize the bleary fright?
He might seem funny were we tight too,
But I wouldn't care for that, would you?

TO A NORMALITE OF 1940

(Who asked me for a "Gem")

I would that I could write a gem
You might be proud to give,
With thoughts like Heaven's light, and words
Like stars to make them live,
With lines like music, pealing forth
Life's passion and its pain,
Its deeper peace, shot through with joy,
Like sunshine after rain;

But mine is merely candle-light,
A fitful, flickering spark,
With tiny, tinkling notes that come
To help me through the dark.
(Yet, in the harmony of Heaven,
The faintest notes find place,
While even a feeble flame, well-trimmed,
May light a little space!)

High hung in halls of deathless fame,
Gleams many a glorious gem,
And I would have you make your choice
Among the best of them.
A mad world looks to youth to-day
To think its problems through;
You need the best that has been done
To help you dare and do.

So, leave this poor, pale verse of mine
To light some little spot,
Go, carry high a brighter torch
That cannot be forgot!
Re-echo some clear, clarion call
To be, and do, your best
In truth, with thoroughness,—and trust
In God to do the rest.

REPLY TO A PESSIMIST

We are not creatures of blind circumstance,
Moulded by mishap, and charted by chance,
Snuffed into nothingness, gone like a glance,
Lost in the waters of Lethe!
Man is the crown of Creation's design,
Born for a place in a Kingdom divine,—
Love is its banner, the Cross is its sign,
Freedom the air it must breathe.

MIRACLES

How do the tiny rosettes know,
While groping through the ground,
Just what each plant must have to grow,
And where such may be found?
How does the plant know where and when
To set out leaf, or stem,
Or make the coloured flowers then,
And pods with seeds in them?

"It's just their nature," teachers tell,
Well, Nature is a miracle!

How does that greedy worm become
A gaudy butterfly?
Or eggs make feathers, brains and bones,
And bird-songs in the sky?
What teaches wasps to build their home,
Or army-worms to march,
And Capistrano swallows come
The 19th day of March?

Just Nature? Yes? Then I know well
That Nature is a miracle!

How did the cells inside of me
Know how to set an ear?
Or make an eye so it can see,
And be washed by a tear?
How is it hearts, and lungs and such,
And teeth, and skin and hair,
And nerves of taste and smell and touch
Come in their places there?

"'Tis Nature, child," you say? Well, well,
Then Nature is a miracle.

A billion years ago one cell
Began to subdivide;
So Nature started, Science tells,
But how came life inside?
And how came that first cell to be,
And how grew each design?
"Such knowledge is too great for me,"
For Nature is Divine.

Nor can mere evolved cells
Fathom Creation's miracles.

CHRISTMAS EVE

Each Christmas Eve I ride a-down
Judea's hills to Bethlehem,
With weary Mary, to the town
Which, heedless, had "no room" for them,
With wondering love, in a manger there,
She wraps her holy first-born Son,
Safe in the watchful, tender care
Of Joseph, God's appointed one.

Then, on the hills where David sang,
I see the shepherds on that night
When angels' joyful chorus rang
Through blinding blaze of glory bright.
The glory fades, but in its place
Shines clear a wonderful new thing,—
The Star the Eastern Magi trace,
Then speed to greet the new-born King.

The wind-swept, snowy prairie here
Becomes Judea's rolling plain,
And angel wings brush very near
As we adore the Babe again.



PRAIRIE TWILIGHT

Coquetting with sun at closing day,
As on the horizon he lingering loll'd,
(His last rays so possessive, almost bold,)
She tires of him, and lightly turns away.

Then blossoms on the air their perfume spray,
And little birds' good-nights are sweetly told,
As Twilight, in her beauty, fold on fold,
Wraps the tired world, lulled in her magic sway.

Across the fading aureole of gold
Her draperies sheer, of rose and lilac, play,
Her kirtle is of purple deep, and grey,
Turquoise and amethyst her wimple hold.

Such changing beauty never can grow old;
O, Prairie Twilight, could you ever with us stay!
But,—Night, like Death, steals loveliness away,
Wrapped in his mantle, dark, mysterious, cold.

CHRISTMAS IN WARTIME

While still they roar, those pounding guns,
Shall we ring bells for Christmas?
Still far from home, husbands, or sons,
Can we still think of Christmas?
Our hearts are numb with pain and care,
For missing ones, for vacant chair,
O, clear Church-bells, peal on, peal on,
Lest we forget 'tis Christmas.

'Twas to a world of cruel crime
The Babe of Bethlehem came;
And all that makes mankind sublime
Comes only in His Name;
'Twas not for gain this weary war,
'Tis Peace they still are fighting for:—
The Prince of Peace, the Child Divine,
His birth on earth made Christmas.

Too long commercial arts have made
A heathen show of Christmas,
In bacchanalian revels fade
The clear, pure lights of Christmas;
Should such be lost to us by war,
But brighter beams the Holy Star.
O, bells, peal on, peal on! We need
The comforting of Christmas.

PIGWEED GREENS

O, Summer, with your birds and bees,
And all that summer means,
The best to me is when I see
A patch of pigweed greens!
The boarding-house may have its hash,
The Chink serve pork-and-beans,
Yet who would care for royal fare,
If offered pigweed greens?

The village garden's gay galore
Of many shapes and sheens
Can offer naught e'er grown or bought
Like good, old pigweed greens.
The summer camper may roast clams,
Or relish tinned sardines,
But there's no charm like our old farm
That grows good pigweed greens.

So, if you live in Canada,
Or if in foreign scenes,
No tropic fruit, no herb nor root
Can equal pigweed greens.

IN THE BEGINNING

Once, when our Solar System was but space, and void,
The Great Creator called a mass of nebulae
And sent it spinning on an orbit He arranged
For it within His universe. Then there was Light!
Bits from the shining mass detached, were whirled
through space

On their own orbits, 'round this central light,—our sun,—
And, whirling, cooled; gases condensed; and water
formed;

A "great deep" covered all the orb we know as "Earth";
The cooling crust arose in ridges. There was Land!

Long ages passed. (Our year,—Earth's circuit 'round
the sun,

Much less the one turn on its axis we call "day,"

Means nothing in Creation's long Eternity!)

Then Life appeared. Whence? Only the Creator knows.

Moss, lichens, grasses, herbs and bushes, and then trees,
With reproductive powers,—root and fruit and seed,—

A lovely world! Yet lonely, till one living cell,—

(Some say by Erin's warm and rocky shore!)

Began to subdivide and move. And so an age

Of living, moving things began,—fishes, then birds,

Reptiles and animals, and, last of all, came Man,

Erect, aggressive, cunning, thinking, animal.

As eons rolled, the mind of man developed so

Toward self-consciousness, and reasoning and choice,

That the Creator Spirit lent him breath divine,

And "man became a living soul," image of God!

Then, with that consciousness of kinship with his God,

Man came to realize the place his mate should fill

In life,—not to be spurned, and not to be obeyed,

But part of him; beside his heart to be beloved,

Beneath his arm for his protecting care; his help,

His equal, and his complement. So Home was born.

As yet the age of humankind upon the earth

Is young, and, in his haste for knowledge, man has erred.

The Tree of Knowledge, and the Tree of Life were meant

To fruit together for his use all in good time.

But Wisdom's ways are slow! Freedom of choice was his,

And he bit deep in knowledge while neglecting life,

So maladjustment causes cruel waste of good.

Once, briefly, the Creator came as Man to show

What fruitage of the Tree of Life, with Knowledge blent,

Might mean; and left a record for man's aim and guide.

When, therefore, Man adopts, and works out this Concept,

The next great Era of Creation may begin.

WHILE THE KETTLE SINGS

November, 1944.

The peaceful prairie lies asleep,
 Wrapped in her snowy coverlet,
Through misty veils a few stars peep,
 But winter winds are quiet yet.
Now, homey sounds seem beautiful,
 The old clock ticks upon the shelf,
My needles click through khaki wool,
 The low fire murmurs to itself.

Then Memory waves her wonder-wand,
 And there upon her silver-screen,
I find a fond and fairy land,
With skies all blue, and fields all green,
For Memory has a happy knack
 Of passing by unpleasant things,
So older folk love looking back,—
 And knitting,—while the kettle sings.



YESTERDAY

They've whisked away in Time's swift whirl;
Our two tall lads and our bonny girl;
The other day they were in my arms,
Sweet and merry, all baby charms.

Just yesterday they went to school,—
Lunches, book-sacks, pencil and rule,
"Hi-ya, Mom!" and "Where's my cap?"
"Sic 'em, Collie!" A terrier's yap.
Twinkling eyes and a wind-blown curl,
"I've got a hankie; I'll be a good girl!"
Whooping-cough and the chicken-pox,
Measles, bumps and cuts and knocks,
And endless mending of clothes and socks!

But now,—to-day,—quiet hours pass;
The ball-diamond's lost in fresh, green grass,
A new colt frisks on the pasture hill,
But the house and the yard seem strangely still.

They're happy and busy,—but far away,
And somehow I wish it were yesterday.

ISABEL

1921

Far in a northern cemetery
Our baby lies asleep,
But no one comes with flowers there
And no one comes to weep.
Across the wide, blue Beaver Lake
The bitter north winds sweep,
But, underneath the warm, brown earth,
Our baby lies asleep.

All through the yard are marble slabs
To mark where loved ones sleep,
But in her narrow, unmarked bed,
Our baby lies asleep,—
Unmarked, but for a wee, green spruce
We planted firm and deep,
That there might be some living green
Above our babe, asleep.

O, poplars, whisper soft and low,
And pretty willows, weep,
While God's green grass and flowers grow
Above our babe, asleep!
O, tender Shepherd, near Thy heart
We pray that Thou wilt keep
Through all the long, long years to come
Our baby, gone to sleep!

FALL SOFTLY SNOW

1944

Fall softly, softly, snow,
Warm the brown earth below,
Where lies our darling.
Lie lightly, lightly, snow,
He was so small, you know,
Gone without warning.

Maybe 'twere better so,—
So little here we know,
Lost in our sorrow,—
God's love is sure, ev'n though
There, underneath the snow
Lies our to-morrow.

Fall softly, softly, snow!
Though storms my heart must know,
Hope's ray I'll borrow
To guide me till the dawn,
When, storm and sorrow gone,
We meet to-morrow.

GOOD-NIGHT BELOVED

We walked to-gether through the shining hours,
As well as through dark days and shadows deep;
We toiled to-gether through both sun and showers—
Now you, dear Heart, rest in your long, last sleep,
While I go on alone as evening lowers;
Yet, memories of you in my heart I keep
To cheer me till I reach those Heavenly Bowers,
Where loved ones never part nor wake to weep.

Good-night, Beloved, till we meet to-morrow,
Where God shall wipe away our every tear!
When life seems dark, Faith's candle I will borrow
To light my pathway through each coming year,
For, when God sends so great a weight of sorrow,
His presence and His help are always near.

LIFE'S SYMPHONY

God meant that life should be a Symphony,—
Our duties are the notes upon Time's Staff;
But, of the cup of Music's ecstasy,
How small a sip we mortals ever quaff!
Take care to keep thy soul in tune with God,
Note each direction on the Printed Page;
For perfect time, heed the Director's rod;—
Live for the music, not the weekly wage.

Strike with firm hand the clear notes that are thine,
Nor slight the grace-notes where they enter in,
For clarion trumpet is no more Divine
Than tender touch on muted violin;
But errors or neglect will mar for thee
The joyous beauty of Life's Symphony.

A TRIOLETTE

Sweet are letters from a friend,
When my day is dark and dreary;
Angels thus a message send,
Sweet are letters from a friend.
Then my troubles seem to end,
I forget that I am weary;
Sweet are letters from a friend,
When my day is dark and dreary.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

Do I burn lignite coal? Why, of course I do, dears,
After all I've been married for twenty-odd years,
And what I have learned about handling a man,—
Well, when I burn lignite I use the same plan.

When you want things your way, it's sullen and black;
Use plenty of kindling to lead the attack;
Then don't try to hurry it ever, I pray,
Just leave it alone,—give it all its own way.

Don't lift off the lids, or the air will be blue,
And don't stir it up, or there's trouble for you.
Just follow this plan and your fire's soon quite hot,
And you've got things your way,—believe it or not!

NEXT YEAR

"Next year I bet I'll have a better tractor!"

"Next year I'm going to trade in this old car!"

"Next winter we can move into the city,—
Come back again in spring, it's not too far."

"Next year I'm going to paint up these old buildings."

"Next year I'm going to build a proper barn."

Next year! The carrot held before the donkey
Who still believes that old Saskatchewan yarn,—

"Next Year!"

ON THE LAWN

Stretched on the grass I love to loll,

When summer brings July,

When fluffs and puffs of carded wool

Toss on the deep blue sky.

Light, lazy breezes lift the weeds

To nod a low "Good-day!"

And all the twigs on all the trees

Wave in a friendly way.

Strawberries blush with happiness,

And flowers scent the air;

The bees and bugs hold holiday,

And birds sing everywhere.

But, ouch! the ants have found me out,—

I'll take the rocking-chair!

WHY DO WE LOVE?

Why do we love the ones we love,
Why do we deem them treasure-trove,
Other folk wonder.
We are not blind to their faults or sins,
But in their need our love begins,—
Is that a blunder?

No one is good; grave faults are ours,
Different faults from theirs, or yours,
Love looks beyond them;
Love sees their motives, and how they try,
Ah! they are heroes to true love's eye,
With a halo 'round them.

OFF THE EARTH

When things get tough,
Life's seas are rough,
And nothing seems worth doing,
The world gone mad,
And mostly bad,
And courage needs renewing,
Then I pretend
I'm off the end
Of earth. From space I view it;
Seen from the skies,
Clear duty lies,
Had we the will to do it.
Mountains of doubt
Are levelled out,
And storms are but a sighing,
Were eyes not bound
Too near the ground
To see the signals flying.

WELCOME HOME

"Welcome Home", the country's shout
Rolls along like thunder.
"Welcome"? Yes, but what about
"Home" for them I wonder.
The Christ-child for His advent found
No place but a manger;
Is yon lad who fought your war
Also such a stranger?

THE STORM KING COMES TO THE PRAIRIE

His canopy low on the horizon looms,
As the Storm-king flings far his dark banner,
The bright, jagged thrust of his dazzling spear
Cleaves the heavens in threatening manner.
The wind-ribbed clouds form a corduroy road
For the thunder to rumble on over,
With low, hanging bits, hounded on by the wind,
Like grey rabbits running for cover.

His trumpeters call up the cavalry grim,
Dark dust-clouds roll thickly before them;
Frayed tumble-weeds madly rush over the hills,
To herald the forces that tore them.
With rattling artillery,—wind-driven hail,—
And roar of the thunder-shells bursting,
The rain, blessed rain, comes to cool and to save
The parched prairie, praying, and thirsting.

MEMORIES OF LONG AGO

Brief breath of perfume through a summer shower,
Swift flash of bluebird's wing through leafy bower,
Dim, drifting dream, gone with the morning hour,—
Memories of long ago.

Faint, far sweet notes of homing meadow-bird,
Echoes of vesper bells but dimly heard,
Aeolian harps' low songs of hope deferred,—
Memories of long ago.

TRACKS ON THE SNOW

Criss-cross foot-tracks on the snow,
Whence they come, or where they go,
You and I will never know.

A wise, old partridge and her brood,
Some stray cat the dog pursued,
Rabbits fleeing coyotes rude,
Little rodents searching food,
By the road and through the wood,
Hungry, watchful, bad and good,

Intrigue, excitement they might show,
Could we follow, would we know
Criss-cross foot-tracks on the snow.

TICK-TOCK

Time might be good,
Were there no clocks,
Reminders rude
Of Duty's knocks,
With tireless "tick",
And endless "tock",
"Time flies! Be quick!"
"No time for talk!"

The clouds drift by,
Buds open slow,
And tides in silence
Ebb and flow,
But,—may I wait
With these? Ah! No!
"Tick, you'll be late!"
"Tock, time to go!"

With pale set face
It drives the hands
At steady pace,
Nor ever stands.
Ev'n should I dare
To stop that clock,
Its silent stare
The deed would mock,
And all the air
Would breathe, "Tick, Tock".



THE POET IN SUMMER

It's much too hot to think.
The edges of my thoughts curl up,
And wither there and die.
Ideas fade and shrink;
Imagination's bubbling springs
Seem to have all gone dry.

The Muse lights on the brink,
But, lest the sun may singe her wings,
She lifts them up to fly,—
Though giving me a wink
To say that when heat-waves furl up,
We'll have another try.

I KNOW A LITTLE HILL

I know a little hill
set in a ridge of hills
and poplar trees
far in the north.

There small wild things find safe retreat
deep in the folds and fringes of its robe;
but, high above, and reverently,
with bared head it greets the rising sun,
and worships silently
till his last rays are lost,
beyond the poplars,
in the still, blue lake.

Then in the darker blue of night,
the small hill-top stands clear,
serene whatever storms may blow,
quiet and confident,
and comforting.

DECEMBER'S PARTY

December thought that she would make
A party Christmas Eve
For Santa and his fairy folk,
Ere for the North they leave.
So, first she sent out Rain and Wind
To wash off dust that lay,
To whisk the cobwebs out of sight,
And pile the leaves away.

Then soft she spread a carpet white
As far as eye could see,
And draped the barns and stacks and posts
As white as white could be,
The moonbeams nipped off stars' bright tips
From some far, twinkling row,
And scattered them like diamond-dust
Upon the new, white snow.

The free-tops knit a netted lace
Around the twilight sky,
Where Night would set out starry plates
And tea-cups by and by.
I watched for Santa's deer and sleigh
So long I do believe
I fell asleep, for I never saw
That party Christmas Eve.

